

OFFICE-BUILDING FIRE SAFETY

Many of the nation's annual 5,000 office-building fires could be prevented if companies and employees followed basic on -the-job fire safety practices. Prevention is the key to a fire-safe workplace!

Arson

Arson is the largest single cause of fires in general office buildings.

- Follow your building's security measures and keep unauthorized people out of the building. Keep doors locked after business hours. Alleys and other areas around your building should be well lit.

Housekeeping

- Keep clutter out of halls, lobbies, alleys, and other public areas.
- Keep waste paper, empty boxes, dirty rags, cleaning supplies, and other combustibles out of exits, storage areas and stairways.

Wiring

- Replace any cracked, frayed or damaged electrical cord.
- Never run extension cords across doorways or where they can be stepped on or pinched or run over by chairs or other furniture. Do not plug extension cords into each other and avoid plugging more than one extension cord into an outlet.
- Be sure to use an appropriate extension cord for the appliance being used.

Equipment and Appliances

- Leave space for air to circulate around heat-producing equipment, such as copy machines, coffeemakers, and computers. Keep appliances away from anything that might catch fire. Do not stack books or papers on top of computer monitors.

- Designate an employee to turn off or unplug all appliances, including coffeemakers and hot plates at the end of each workday.
- Do not stack boxes or item higher than 18 inches from the ceiling or any sprinkler head.

Smoking

Cigarettes, matches and lighters are a major cause of all fires. Many companies have banned smoking in their buildings as a health concern and to decrease the possibility of fires.

- If your company allows smoking in the workplace, smoke only where permitted. Do not flick ashes onto floors or into wastebaskets. Use large, non-tip ashtrays, and make sure everything in them is cold before you empty them.
- Apply the same cautions to visitors and be alert to smoldering cigarette butts on furniture or in wastebaskets.

Plan Ahead

In the event of a fire, a safe and speedy response depends on how well employees and employers are prepared for emergencies.

Employees should...

- Count the doors or desks between their work areas and the nearest exit. During a fire, employees may have to find their way out in the dark.
- Learn the location of alternative exits from their work areas in case the primary exit is blocked by smoke.
- Know the location of the nearest fire alarm and how to use it so co-workers can be alerted to the fire.

Employers should...

- Post building evacuation plans and discuss them during new-employee orientations.
- Conduct regular fire drills.
- Include disabled employees in the fire emergency planning process.

If Fire Strikes...

- Sound the alarm and call the fire department immediately, no matter how small the fire appears to be.
- Leave the area quickly, closing doors as you go to contain the fire and smoke.
- If you encounter smoke or flame during your escape, use an alternative exit. Heat and smoke rise, leaving cleaner, cooler air near the floor. If you must exit through smoke, crawl on your hands and knees, keeping your head 12 to 24 inches (30 to 60 centimeters) above the floor.
- Test doors before you open them. Kneeling or crouching at the door, reach up as high as you can and touch the door, the knob, and the space between the door and its frame with the back of your hand. If the door is hot, use another escape route. If the door is cool, open it slowly.
- Once outside, move away from the building. Never go back inside the building until the fire department says you may go back in.

Portable Fire Extinguishers

Most portable fire extinguishers are appropriate only for fighting small, contained fires, such as a fire in a wastebasket.

Employers who provide portable fire extinguishers should designate and train specific employees to operate them. If you are unfamiliar with the extinguisher or proper fire-fighting techniques, do not endanger yourself and your co-workers by attempting to fight even a small fire.

Before fighting a small fire, be sure the fire department has been called and that everyone has left the fire area.